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Feb. 12, Bl. Humbeline, Abbess

Gerelyn Hollingsworth | Feb. 12, 2010 NCR Today

Today is the feast of Bl. Humbeline, the sister of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. [1] She was born at Dijon, c. 1092, and died at Jully-les-Nonnais, c. 1136.

Her parents, Burgundian nobles, had seven children, six boys and one girl. Her mother died when Humbeline was eighteen. After her father and all her brothers had become monks at Clairvaux, Humbeline, heir to the family fortune, married Guy de Marcy, a nobleman of the house of Lorraine.

She went to visit her brothers at their monastery one day, dressed in the clothes of a noblewoman. "St. Bernard refused to see her, 'detesting and execrating her as a net of the devil to catch souls', and he turned round and fled. Her other brother, Andrew, did not mince his words in describing her as 'bundled dung'--as a result of which she burst into tears."

--The famous story is included in *Studies in Cistercian Art and Architecture: Cistercian Nuns and Their World,* [2] by Meredith Parsons Lillich, Cistercian Publications, 2006.

"Bernard naturally relented and came out to greet her. He told her to return to her husband but to model her style of life on that of their pious mother. After two years her husband 'released her according to the rite of the Church' and she 'went to the monastery of Jully where she vowed to God to live the rest of her life with the nuns serving him there'."

Lillich's book contains various illustrations of incidents in Humbeline's life.

Humbeline became abbess of Jully, and became known for her mortifications. Three of her brothers were present at her death, and she died in Bernard's arms.

For more about Jully-les-Nonnais, see *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France,* [3] by Penelope D. Johnson, University of Chicago Press, 1994. (Those interested in the history of women's religious life will be fascinated by the details in this book. In the two centuries after Humbeline's death, the nuns would be excommunicated, the convent would be suppressed, and the monks who had ruled them would take their revenues.)

Click here [4] for a picture of Bl. Humbeline entering the convent at Jully. The abbess receiving her is Elizabeth, who had been married to Humbeline's brother Robert before he asked to be released so that he could join Bernard at Clairvaux.

Click here [5] for a picture of Bl. Humbeline in habit and choir mantle.

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Links:
[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_of_Clairvaux
[2] http://www.amazon.com/Studies-Cistercian-Art-Architecture-Cistersian/dp/0879075945/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1265924765&sr=1-2#reader_0879075945
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